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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000659

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KS](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: ROH CRITICIZES JAPAN IN MARCH 1 SPEECH

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a speech marking the 87th anniversary of the March 1 Independence Movement, President Roh offered clear, but relatively measured, criticism of the Koizumi government's handling of historical and territorial issues. He acknowledged that Japan had apologized for its wartime aggression but chastised Japanese leaders for letting their actions undermine their words. Roh made thinly veiled references to Seoul's opposition to Japan's UNSC aspirations as well as to moves to change Japan's "Peace Constitution." Roh also indicated that he will continue to promulgate a re-examination and "rectification" of Korea's modern history. END SUMMARY.

COMMEMORATION OF ANTI-JAPANESE MOVEMENT

¶2. (SBU) President Roh marked the 87th anniversary of the March 1 Movement for Independence from Japan by calling for Japan to face up to its history and mend its ways. Recalling that last year's March 1 speech had a similar thrust, Roh observed that "not much has changed over the past year, from the war shrine worshipping, to distorted history textbooks, to the Dok-do issue." He specifically rejected as disingenuous PM Koizumi's explanation that his visits to Yasukuni were personal, intended to renew anti-war resolve, and not subject to intervention by other countries. Roh explicitly acknowledged that Japan has already apologized for its wartime aggression and said Korea was not looking for another reiteration. Rather, he said, Korea sought actions befitting the apology. He specifically urged Japan to emulate Germany in this regard.

¶3. (SBU) Making a thinly veiled reference to Japan's UNSC aspirations, Roh stated that if Japan wanted to be a "world leader," then it needed first to "win over the confidence of the international community by actions consistent with universal conscience and duty, rather than through constitutional amendments or military build-up." Roh expressed confidence that most of the Japanese people would agree with him.

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF

¶4. (SBU) Roh closed his 10-minute speech by calling for the ongoing re-examination of Korea's modern history, saying that uncovering the truth was the precondition for forgiveness and reconciliation at home. Just as Koreans were demanding that

Japan face up to its history, Korea too must uncover the truth and rectify misrepresentations in its own history.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) This year's March 1 speech was relatively mild compared to Roh's two previous speeches honoring the birth of the movement for Korean independence from Japan. This can be attributed to the lack of timely, high-profile provocation from Japan, such as Japan's Ambassador to the ROK provided last year by declaring just days before March 1 that the Liancourt Rocks were in fact Japan's Takeshima, not Korea's Dokdo. It may also reflect a decision to find balance between continuing to press Japan to be honest about its history and stopping short of alienating Japan ahead of the upcoming UNSYG race in which the ROKG plans to field FM Ban. We also note that Roh studiously avoided the pitfall he stumbled into in 2004, when he seemed to frame the relocation of Yongsan Garrison as an issue of Korean independence. Finally, Roh's reference to the re-examination of Korea's own history suggests a push on that front that could have implications for domestic politics, including the May 31 nation-wide regional elections and next year's presidential election. END COMMENT.

VERSHBOW